

Fishing For Fluke in the Manasquan River (June 6, 2025)



Our Discussion Tonight

- What Gear is best
- When to fish
- Where to fish
- Bait
- Techniques
- Odds and ends
- Q & A

- **Note: There are NO secret spots in the river. Or spots that have never been discovered before...**
- **Fluke need protection from predators, protection from current, and access to food. These “spots” are called “prime lies”. When one fish is caught from a prime lie, another fish takes its place. That’s why some spots produce better than others!**
- **Depth, bottom structure, and tidal flow determine prime lies in the river**

What Gear is Best?

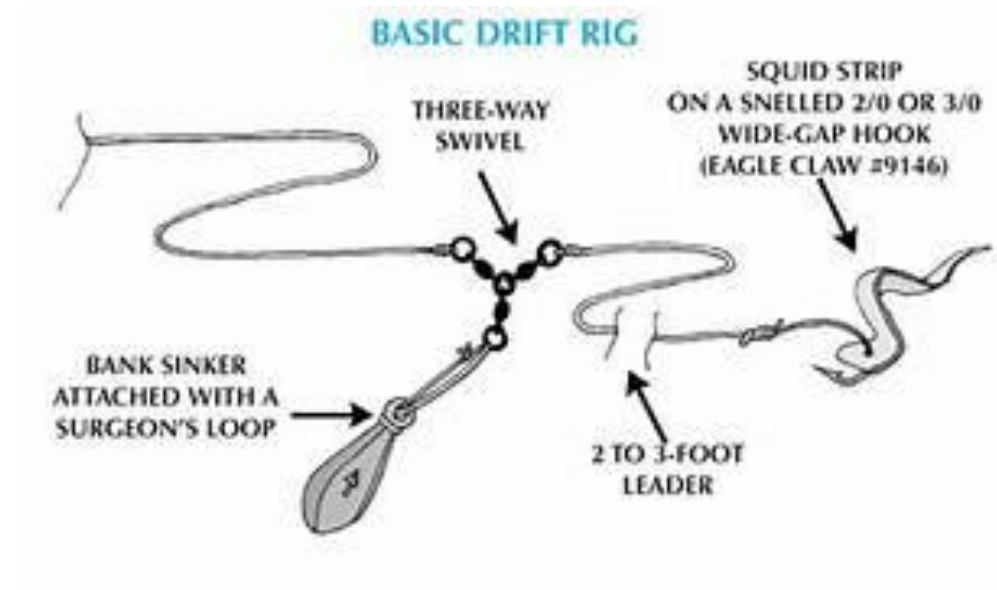
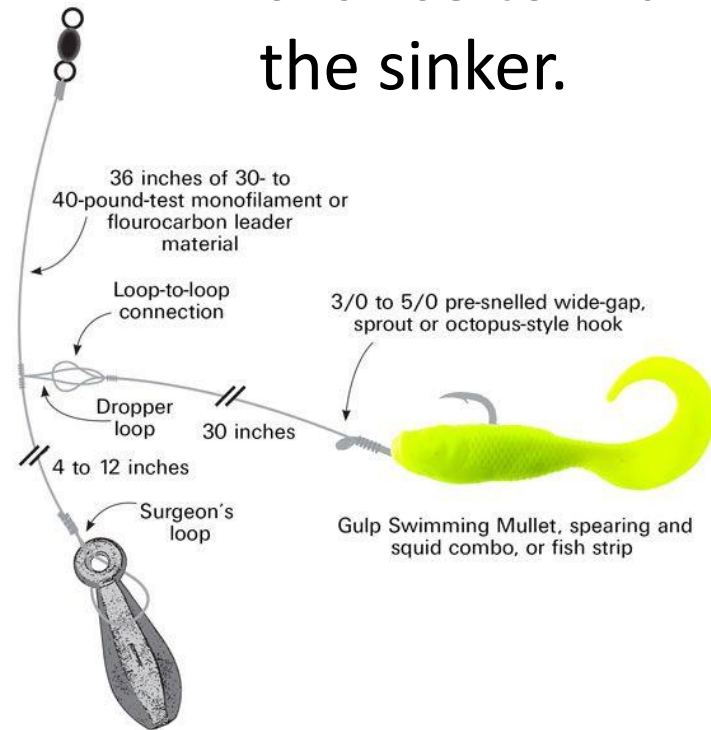


- From a boat: a 6 ft to 6-1/2 ft light-weight conventional or spinning rod. The water is only 6 to 18 feet deep
- From shore: a 7 or 8 ft. spinning rod and reel
- 12# to 20# test line is fine...mono or braid really doesn't matter, since the water isn't deep. With braid, much of it won't even be in the water if you have a top shot of mono
- Hooks: A 3/0 Kayle wide-gap hook or 5/0 octopus.
- If using a spro-type jig, then ¼ - ½ ounce should be sufficient
- Sinkers: 1 oz to 3 oz **bank** sinker depending on current (No flat or pyramid sinkers)



What Gear is Best? (Traditional Rig)

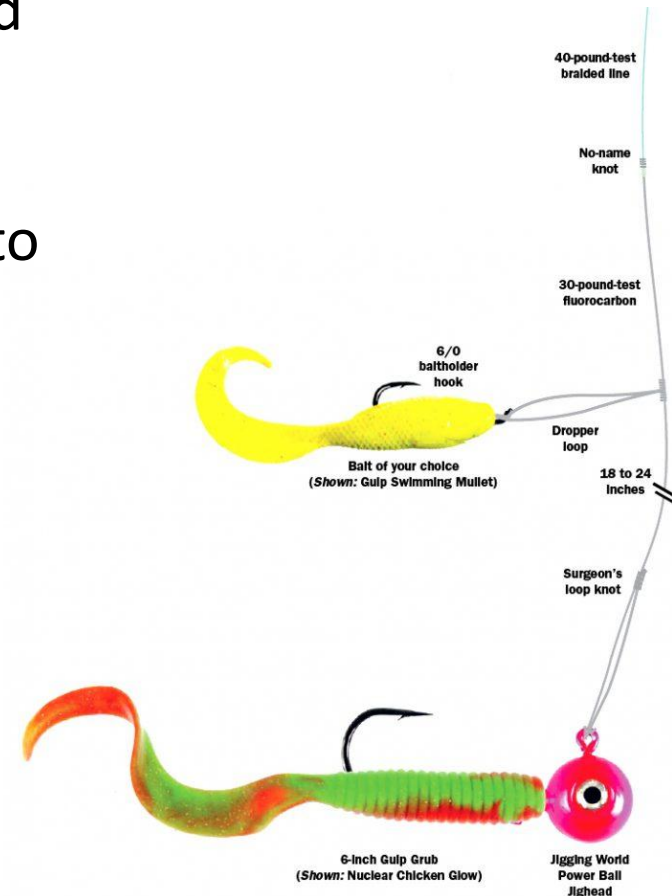
The traditional fluke rig has a single hook on a 2-3 ft leader. Best used when drifting. It gives the fluke a chance to munch the bait before feeling the weight of the sinker.



What Gear is Best? (Jigs)

Spro jigs are the most popular, but ball heads and chrome balls also work well. I always have a “hi hook” when using a jig in the river. Squid, spearing, gulp, or an Otter Tail should be added to the jig.

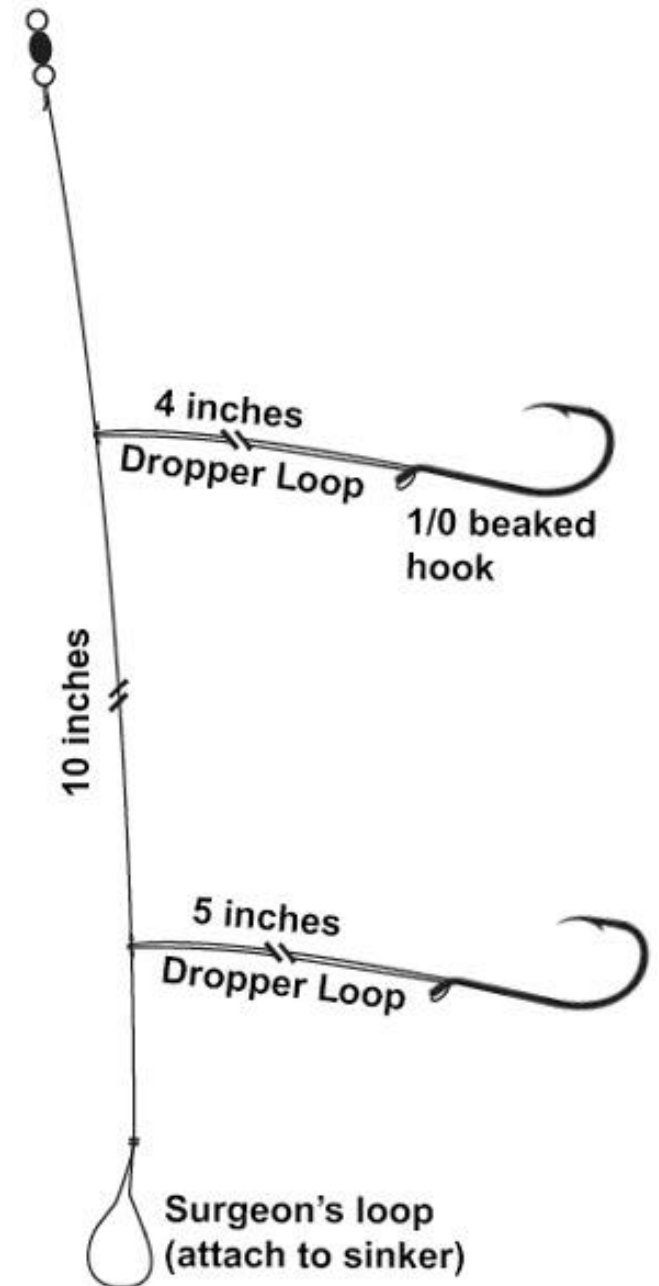
If using a longer strip of squid (or bluefish), consider attaching a stinger hook to the jig!



What Gear is Best? (Hi-Low Rig)

A hi-low rig gives you the benefit of 2 baits in the water.

You can use Kayle or octopus hooks, and experiment with different baits on the top and bottom hook to see what they want. You could also use gulp on both hooks and vary the color until a pattern is clear (or not)



When to Fish?

- In season! Although fluke will be in the river both before and after the formal season dates
- Keeper fluke will be in the river by opening day of fluke season in early May each year. The water is warmer in the river than in the ocean, and they are chasing bait as well. Warm sunny days are best.
- Keeper fluke will be in the river all season long, but many of the “big gals” move out to the ocean during late June to early July. Thus, most of the river-caught fluke will be shorts during the dog days of summer.
- It’s basically a daytime fishery since fluke are visual feeders.
- The fishing is better when there is less boat traffic, so high traffic times are not ideal.

The best time to fish is “when you can”, since they don’t always follow the rules!

When to Fish? (What tide is best)

- 3 hours either side of high tide will give you the most water to fish.
 - You can catch fish at low tide in the middle of the channel, but the water will be turbid, and there will likely be more seaweed.
- If it's a dropping tide when I start fishing...I usually start up by the Rt 70 bridge and work my way down to the inlet
- If it's a rising tide when I start fishing...I usually start by the inlet and work my way up toward the Rt 70 bridge
- If it's approximately high tide, it gives me a chance to fish more of the open areas between the Rt 35 bridge and the PP Canal

Where to Fish?

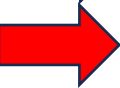
- Basically, you want to fish:
 - the deeper waters
 - the sides of the channels
 - Close to the buoys, bulkheads, and day markers
 - On the mussel beds
- It's easier on a boat, but the same principles apply from shore
- The following pictures show the river bottom from the inlet up to the Rt 70 bridge. They are images from the Garmin Navionics phone app.
- When in doubt, look for where the other boats are...especially kayaks and small skiffs...these guys are regulars and specialize in fishing in the river

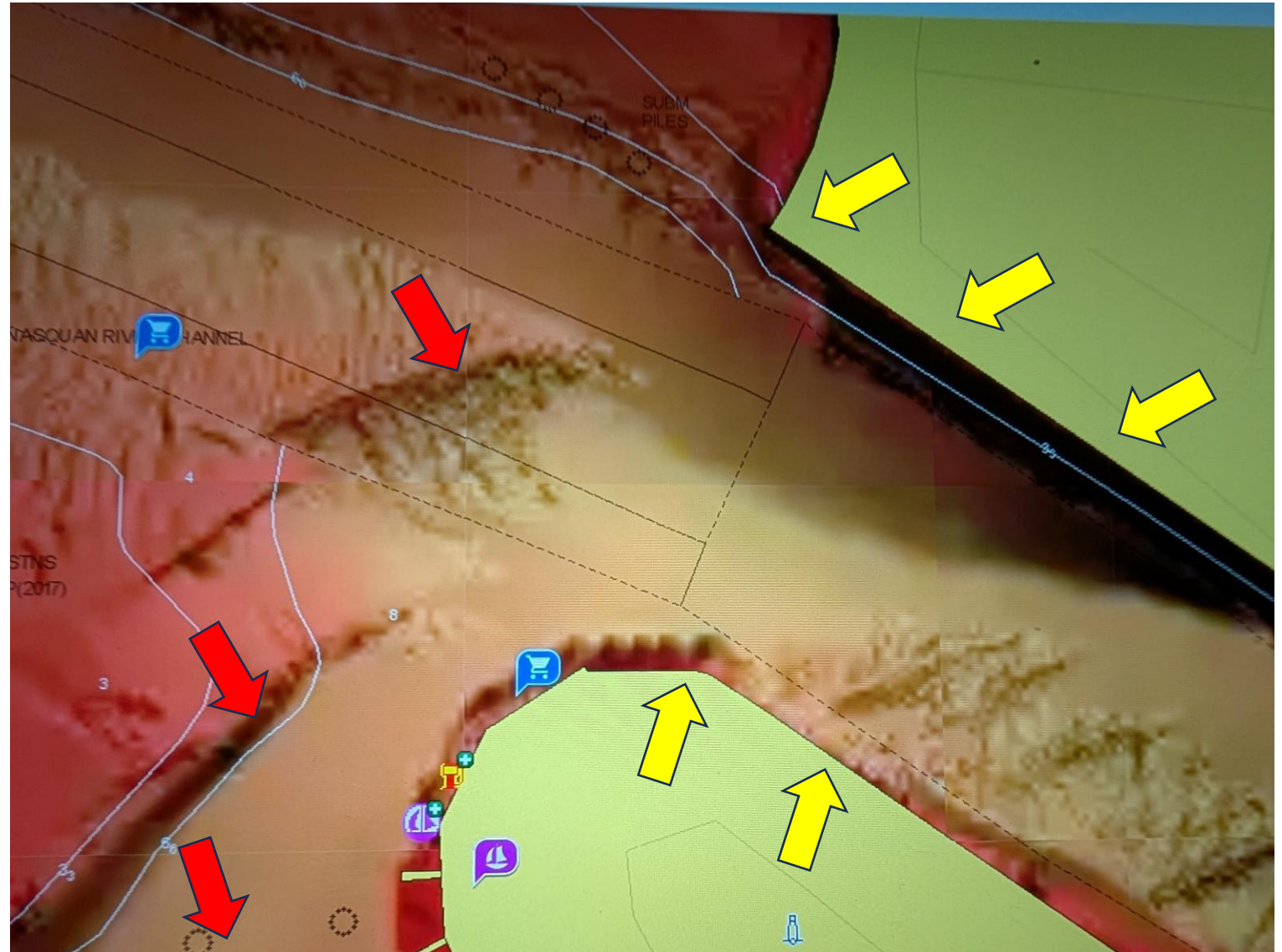
Where to Fish – The Inlet

You are technically not allowed to fish from a boat “in the inlet”. **It’s a safety thing!**

There are mussel beds off the Manasquan side with the constant tidal current. Bring some extra rigs along.

Don’t overlook the hole in front of Captain Bill’s Landing and Fisherman’s Supply. It’s deep, and holds big fluke. Cooks Creek can be calm if it’s windy out, but be careful of party boats and boats coming for gas or restaurants. They will not be patient...

-  - Shore fishing
-  - Boat fishing

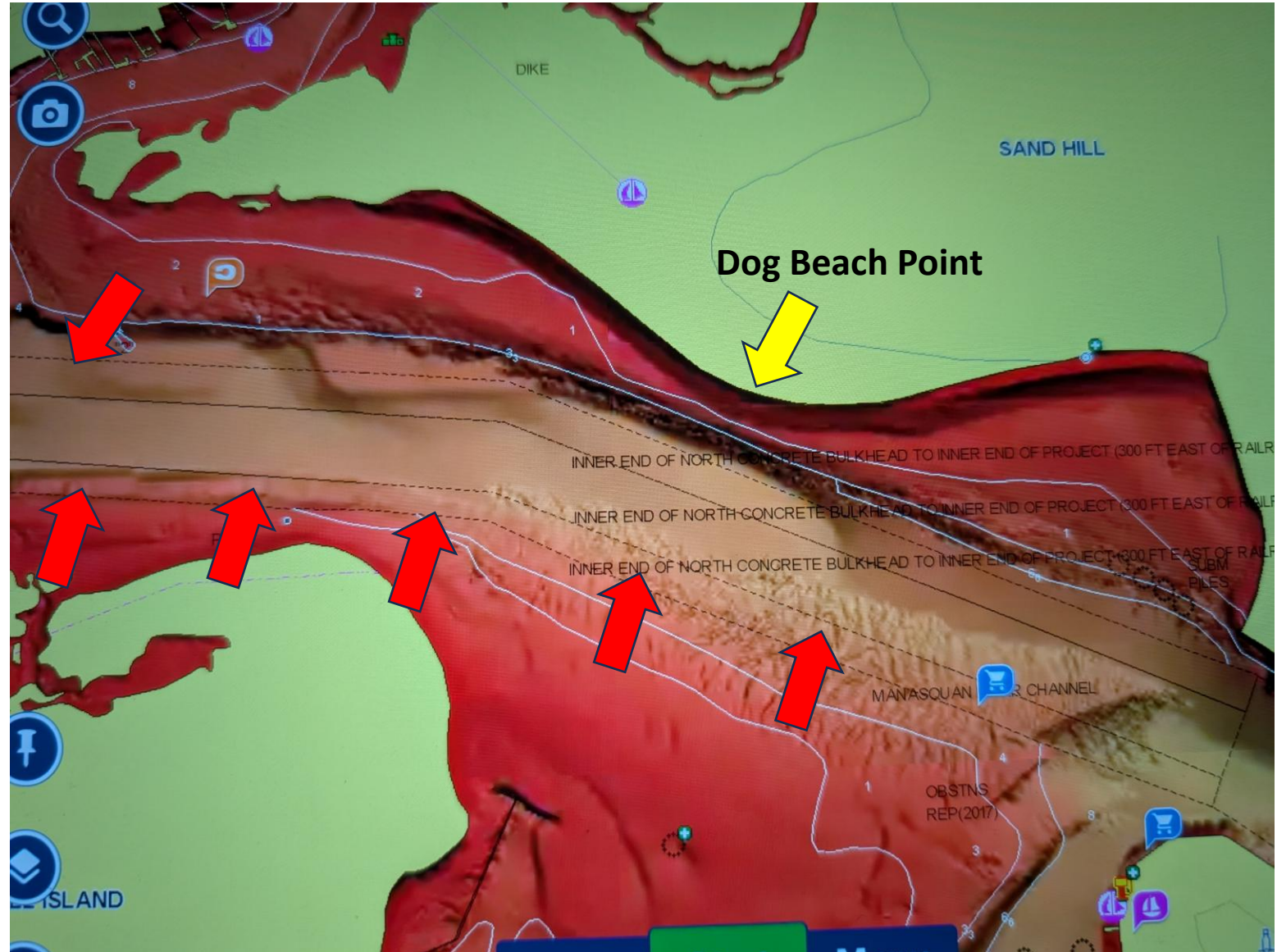


Where to Fish?

Dog beach point (at Fisherman's Cove) is always busy because of access to the channel and deep water. Either side of the point is not as good. While you can wade out in lower water and cast into the channel, a large wake can be dangerous.

On an incoming tide, a long drift can be set up along Gull Island all the way to the railroad bridge if the wind is light or cooperative.

You need to be careful near the north side of the channel near Crabtown Creek channel since the current can really rip on an incoming tide and jam you into the railroad bridge.

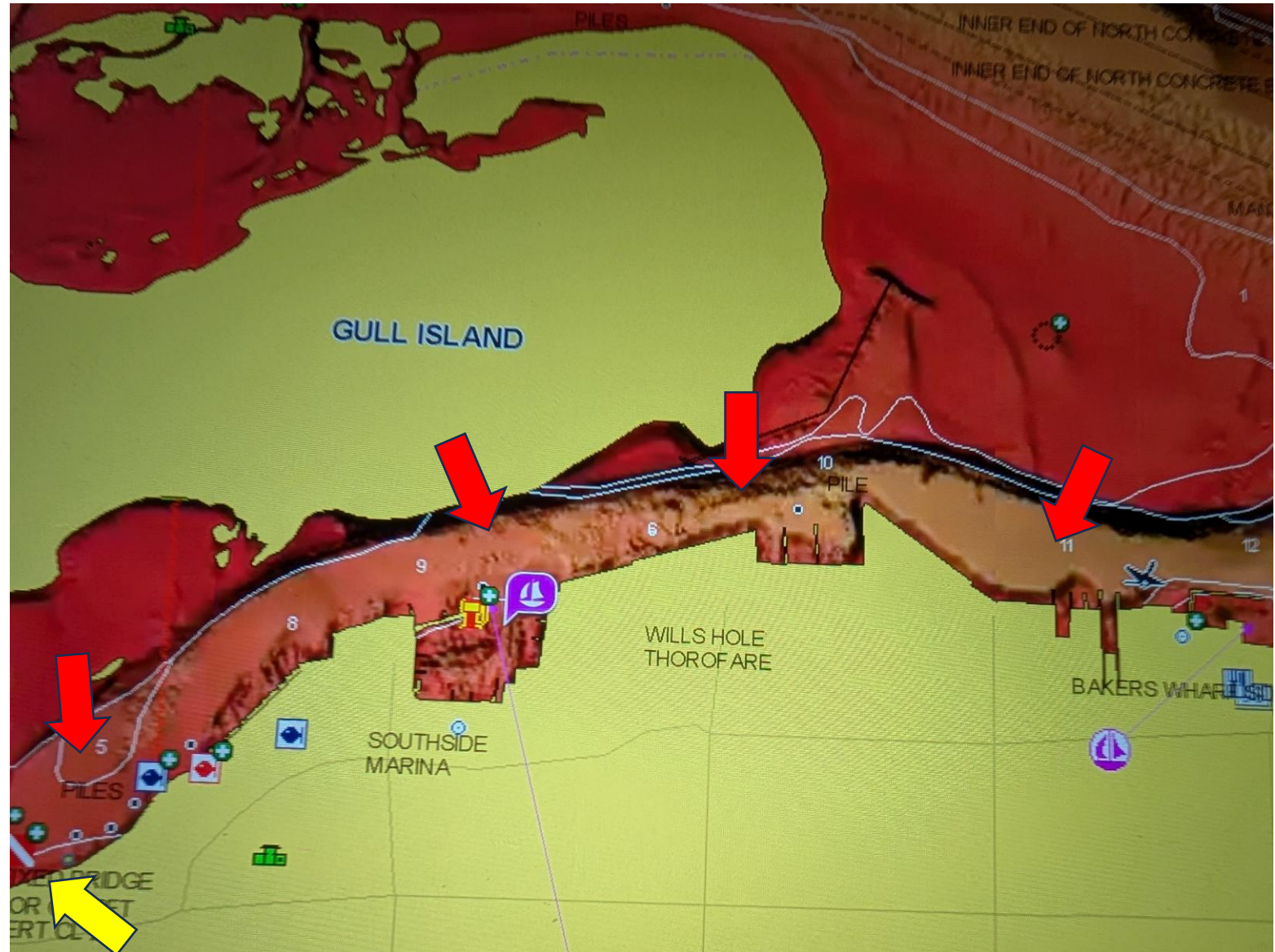


Where to Fish?

The channel that runs from the Lobster Shanty to the Queen Mary has all the characteristics of ideal water.

I've not personally had great luck there, but it's worth a drift or two as the current generally runs straight.

Gull Island Park next to Spike's) affords parking and access to mussel beds and 15ft deep water at high tide. Much of the rest of the channel is private property and may be hard to access from shore.



Where to Fish?

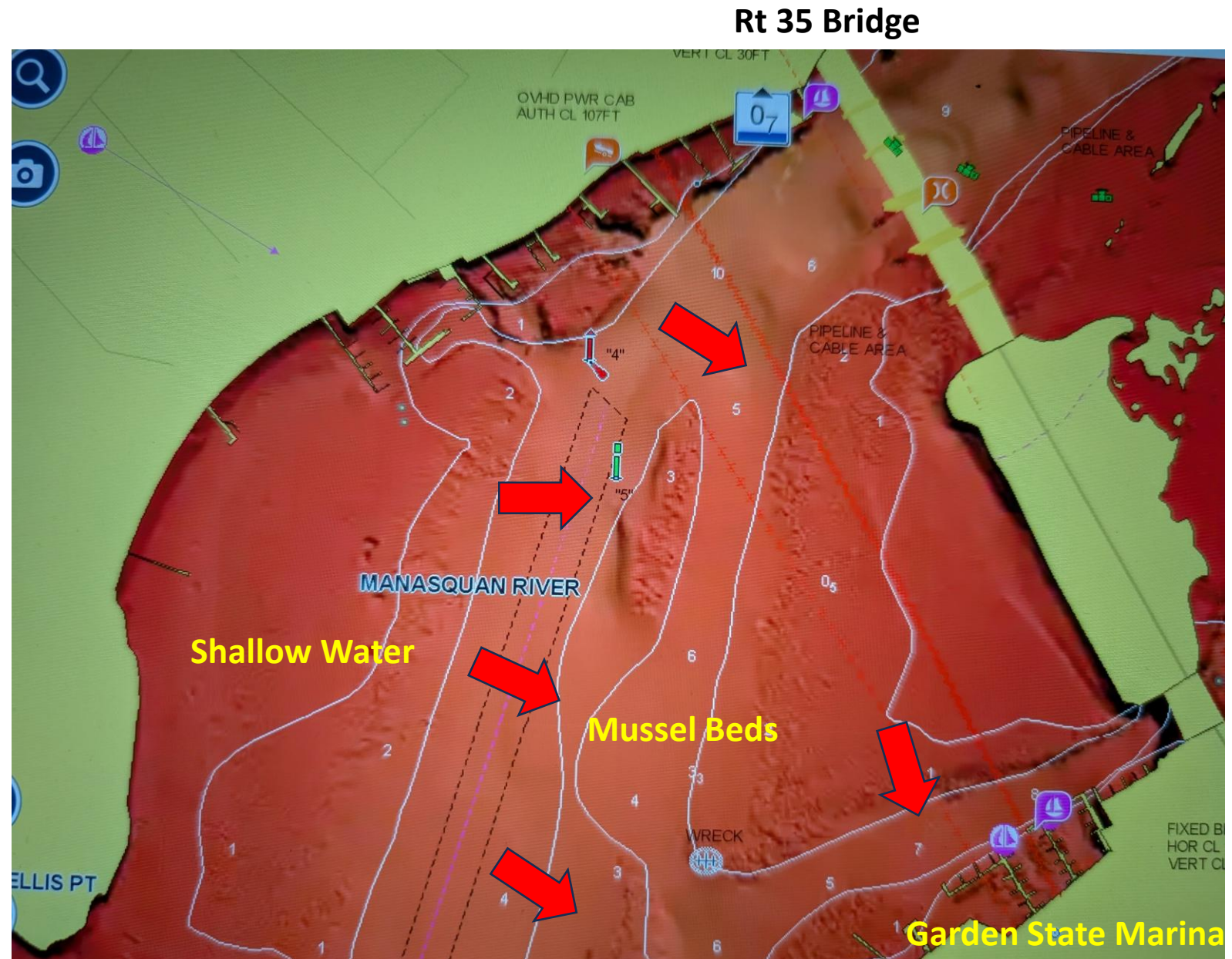
Fishing is not permitted between the railroad bridge and the Rt 35 bridge although some people do it.

West of the Rt 35 bridge the channel is marked with day markers. Fish the channel, especially along the slopes.

There is a channel by Garden State Marina that is worth checking out. The current may be slower here than in the main channel.

The water on the south side of the main channel is deeper and holds fish on all tides. Water gets VERY shallow to the north side, so DON'T FISH THERE.

Keep an eye on your depth finder.



Where to Fish?

The channel in front of Clark's Landing isn't real deep but holds nice fluke. There are always boats drifting there.

Fishing is best on the south side of the channel edges and near the day markers along this stretch. Be careful to not drift into them, and there are often nesting ospreys which are to be kept at a safe distance.



Where to Fish?

Boats entering the river from the PP Canal will speed up to 25 mph heading to the ocean, so beware of them and their wakes. West of the canal there is a no wake zone, so speed is not an issue.

When the tide is running out of the canal, blues may set up at the mouth since bait is discombobulated by the mixing currents. Cast an ava or deadly dick and catch a few. Bluefish strips make excellent fluke bait. Cut them like you would squid strips.



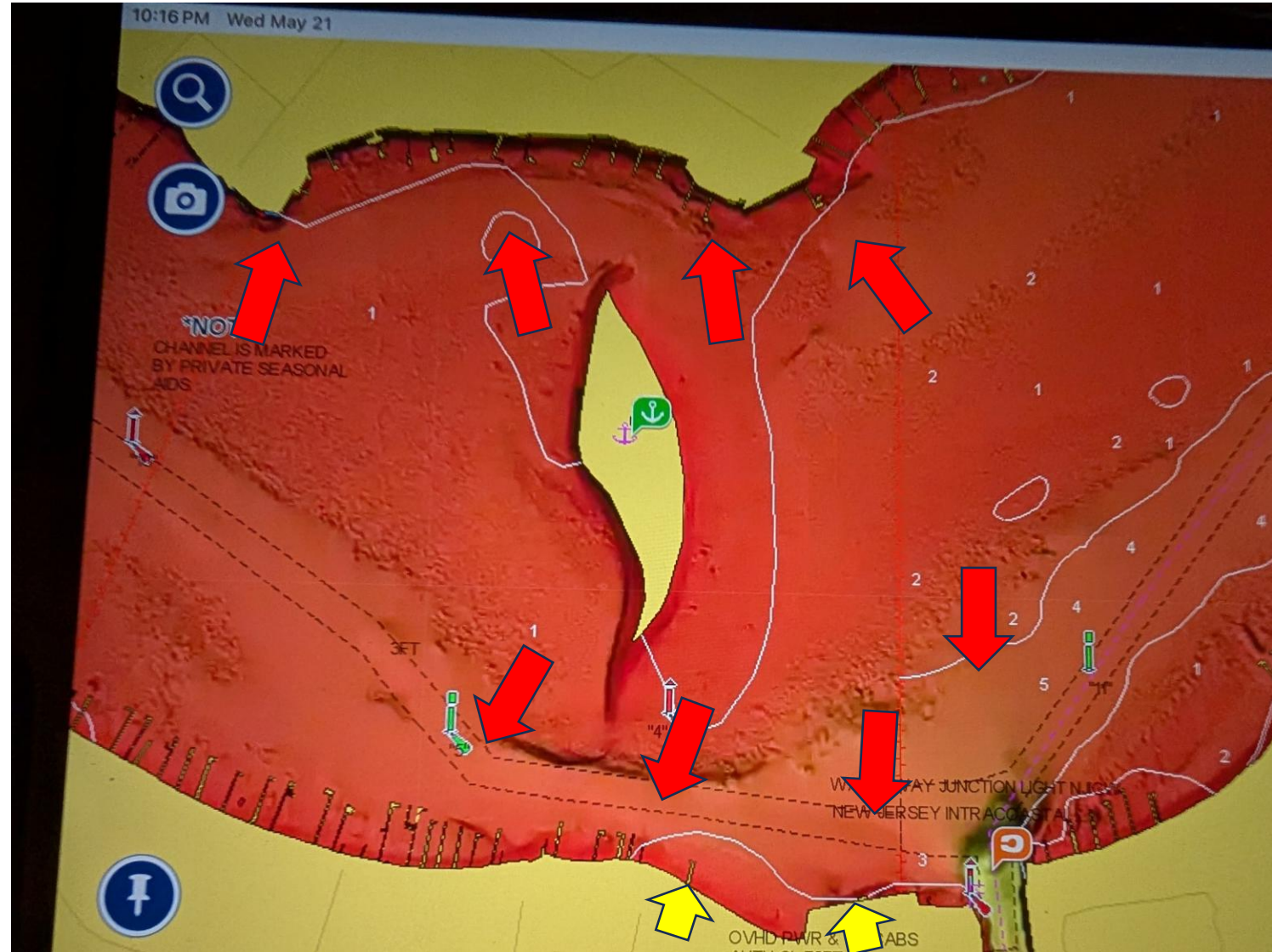
Point Pleasant Canal

Where to Fish?

Riverfront Park (where the old PP Hospital was) has parking and excellent water access. There is a fishing pier and a bulkhead with a rail. Other anglers may be there, so be courteous.

The channel is deep and the PP Canal empties into the river at the eastern edge of the property. The tidal current bounces off this spot on both incoming and outgoing tides.

Boats can drift from the day marker to the park, and along the bulkhead. Don't drift into the canal which drops off to 30 ft depth. Opposite Treasure Island, there is a channel less travelled that holds nice fish. Best to enter from the west although it's OK to exit to the east at higher tides. Watch your depth finder! (At least its mostly sandy bottom)



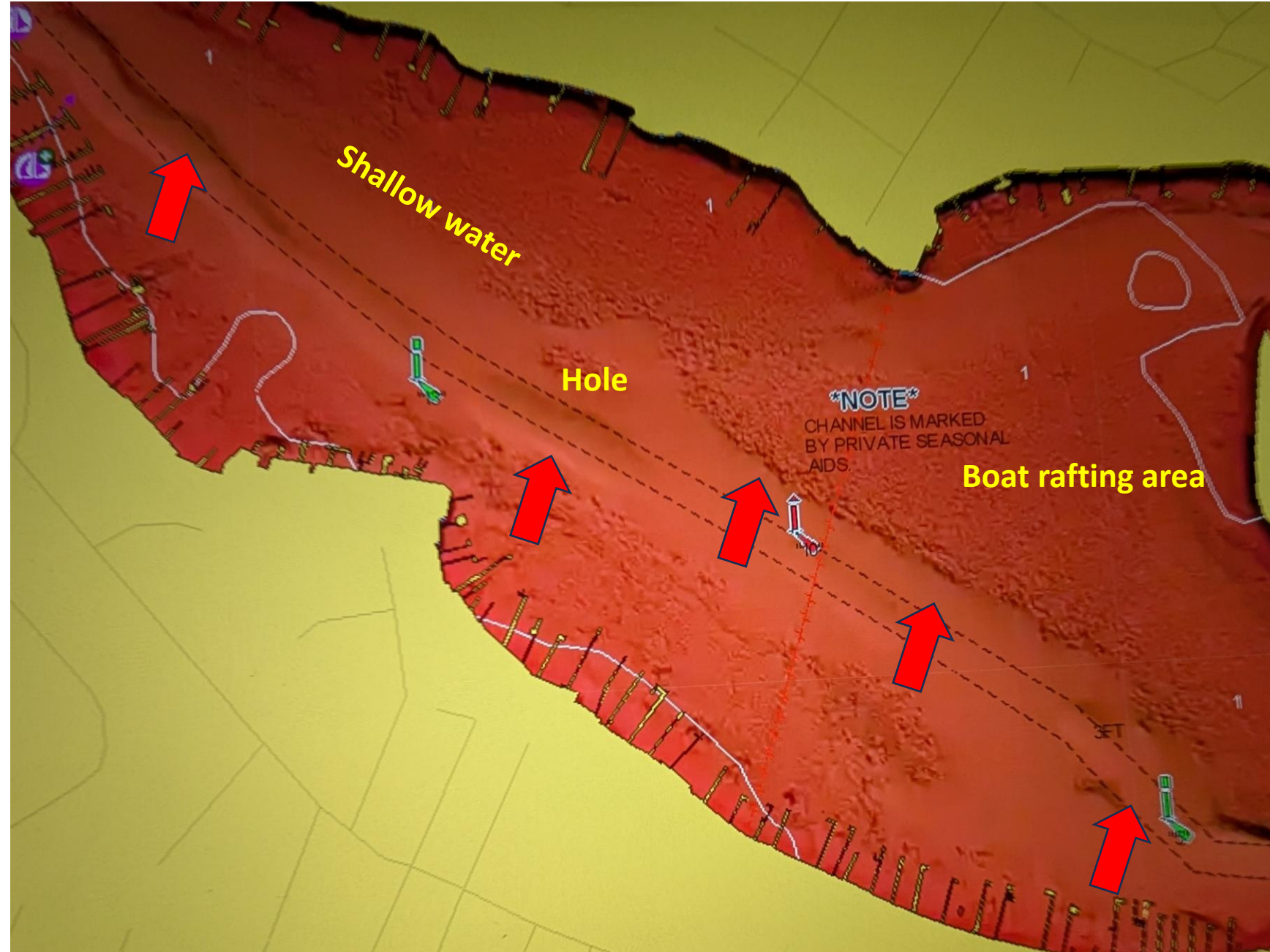
Riverfront Park

Where to Fish?

The stretch between the PP Canal and the Rt 70 bridge has a distinct channel but the tidal current slows as the river is wider. Fish the channel edges and holes. The bottom is muddy here and fluke will be very dark brown in color.

Avoid the areas outside the channels since it gets shallow quickly. If you feel weight on the line, it may be blue claws on your bait. Bring them slowly near the surface but not "at." They can be netted as a nice appetizer!

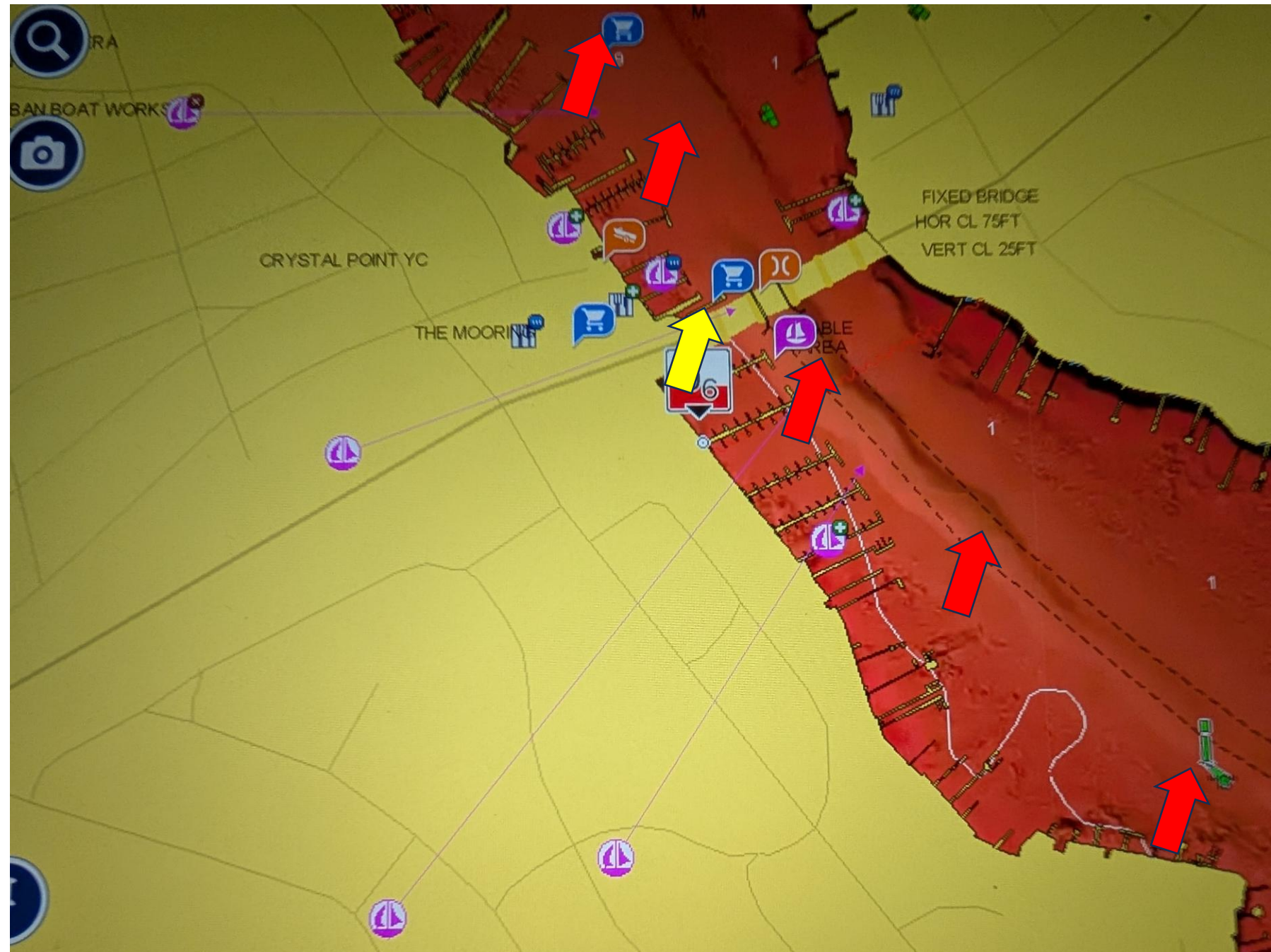
Just west of Treasure Island is an area where boats raft up, especially on weekends. This is a no wake area.



Where to fish?

The area around the Rt 70 bridge is predominantly for channel fishing. The water is deep at all tides...usually 12 to 18 feet. The wind can blow you across the channel, so keep your engine running for quick adjustments. You can fish up to the west end of the marinas and then the water gets shallow quickly. Bluefish love it up here in the late spring and early summer, even when they are not visible on top.

There is a fishing pier under the Rt 70 bridge accessible from the "south" side that gets you all the way out to the channel.



Bait (the traditional ones)

- Live killies work great in the river. ½ pint is sufficient for 1 or 2 people but get a full pint if there's more. Bigger killies do get bigger fish, but unfortunately many will be smaller. If you can catch your own killies, you are “golden”. Hook them through the lips. Replace them when they stop wiggling.
- Spearing should be hooked through the eye sockets. Use more than one if they are 2” or less.
 - Put a killie on the bottom hook and spearing on the top if using a hi-low rig.
- Squid should be cut into strips ½ inch wide and 4-6+” long. Use a stinger hook if the squid is 6” or more. One or two pierces through the top of the strip is all that's needed...let it flutter in the current.
- You can leave the clam bait at home when fishing for fluke.

Bait (the lesser-known ones)

- Bluefish and sea robins make excellent fluke bait. It may be worth a run outside the inlet to land a few if you have the time. Cut and hook them the same as squid strips, but be sure to pass the hook through the skin as this will keep the bait on the hook.
- Mackerel and albie strips also make great fluke bait.
- These baits tend to be quite durable, so they will work even if mawed by a number of fish.
- These baits will also attract crabs, so be aware of “weight on the line” and net them if you want. (no license required)

Using Gulp and Otter Tails

- Artificial baits work well. Some anglers use them exclusively since they are readily available, relatively clean, and inexpensive since they are re-usable.
- They can be combined with “real” bait on a hi-low rig or even on the same hook.
- Chartreuse for turbid (dirty) water, white for clean water, pink since it always seems work well. And nuclear chicken (mixed red and green) since it is sometimes what they want when all others fail to produce.
- Experiment and keep changing up till you find what works
- 3-4” swimming mullets, or grubs are good for the river.
- Otter tail is a synthetic “pork rind” that comes straight or curly tail. Poke one hole in the head and combine it with gulp or bait. It won’t come off the hook easily, even when you are done fishing!

Techniques from Shore (Casting)

- Cast into the channel or deepest water and let the bait or jig sink to the bottom.
- Tighten the slack
- Lift the rod tip a couple of feet to hop the bait toward you on your retrieve
- Cast in a fan pattern to cover the water (space permitting)
- Repeat the process
- Lighter weight sinkers and jigs are less likely to get hung up.
- Fly fishing for fluke works well too! Use a sinking line and a 2/0 chartreuse and white clouser minnow. Strip with a steady motion.

Techniques from a boat (bouncing versus dragging)

- Bait can be bounced or dragged along a drift. You want to keep it moving! Either can be effective, but don't dead-stick a line since sometimes you have to move quickly, and it can interfere.
- It is rare to get hung up and lose rigs but it does happen. It may be possible to reposition the boat up-current and then pull the snag free.
- Jigs should be dropped to the bottom and bounced but NOT dragged. Give the rod tip constant but light twitches to keep the jig moving.

Techniques from a boat (drifting)

- Strive for the longest drifts possible given current and wind. Sometimes, a north/south wind overpowers the current and the drift is across the channel. Take what you get, and recognize that you will need to reposition the boat frequently. Keep the engine in gear during these occasions.
- Sometimes there is slack tide or wind against current and no drift. The captain can bump the engine into and out of gear to create a drift for these occasions. ...but the captain doesn't get much fishing in 
- When there is no current, it is also possible to cast from the boat and retrieve as if you were fishing from shore.
- When repositioning or stopping the boat at a new spot, often the boat **glides** faster than the current. This is a “magic moment” and anglers should drop their bait immediately. The bait appears to be running away, and the competitive fluke will often strike the bait before the boat even comes to a stop.

Netting Your Catch

- More fluke are lost at the net than at any other time after the hook has been set. (Don't be the net-guy that loses the keeper!)
- Fluking in the river is different than in the ocean since the fish have no space to swim down deep so they will "run". They also are closer to the boat and will be boat-side more quickly than in the ocean. Thus, they are "green" and still lively.
- Call for a net before you get a keeper to the boat. The net person should be at your side while holding the net out of the water. If you have to wait for the net, they may come off the hook and drift away.
- Bring the fluke to about 6-12" below the surface but DO NOT lift the head out of the water for any reason. A large "green" fluke can shake its head snapping the line or pulling the hook.
- The net person should place $\frac{3}{4}$ of the net in the water at a 30 deg angle.
- The angler with the fish steers the head of the fish into the net which is then lifted up, holding the fish.
- DO NOT come down on the fish with the net
- DO NOT try and net the fish from the tail
- Small fluke or shorts can easily be lifted out of the water into the boat
- Use a rubberized or coated net to reduce strain on the fish

Odds and Ends

- Safety first. Hooks are sharp. Mind the depth, other boats, and their wakes
- Repeat productive drifts (one fish → two fish)
- If you feel a constant rap-rap-rap-rap-rap, it means you are on a mussel bed...they are not bites
- Check your drag, not too tight or too loose...large fish will run
- If there is a lot of seaweed:
 - try jigging since there is less line in the water
 - Move west further up-river
 - Call it a day since the fluke won't find your bait
- The color of the fluke tells you what the bottom structure is:
 - Light brown is on sandy bottom
 - Dark brown is on muddy bottom
 - Dark brown with white spots is on a mussel bed or shells

Tight Lines!
Don't forget to tag some fish...



Q & A?